

Networking. For many of us, that one little word often conjures up a feeling of dread and uneasiness, but it shouldn't. Networking is about making connection and building relationships with individuals you might not otherwise have met. This is an opportunity many nonprofit professionals ignore to their own detriment.

The individuals you meet could be your organization's next community advocate, board member, volunteer, donor, or corporate sponsor. When you make the effort to attend network building events on a regular basis you will begin to make long last relationships with people from a wide range of background. Isn't that what you need to **get the word out about your movement**?

Does the idea of attending an event like this terrify you? You would be surprised by how many people feel shy and out of place when networking. Remember, you are ALL there to meet new people. When you see a group talking simply walk up, introduce yourself along with your organization, and shake everyone's hand. A good trick to get comfortable is to volunteer to help at or stand by the registration table. You will meet everyone that walks in for the event and, most likely, be the first hand they shake.

A recent article in the *Foundation Center* says,

*Try not to see networking only as a way of getting something out of someone for your personal gain. This should be a two-way street, in which both of you are learning things about one another and building a meaningful connection. ...at the very least you might make a friend or get some good practice for future networking opportunities.*

Tips for a successful networking experience:

- **Business Cards** – You want people to remember you and the best way for them to do that is to give them a reminder about who you are and your organization. Bringing business cards when you network is key. When someone gives you their card make a few notes about them and what you talked about on the back.
- **The Follow Up** – As any good fundraising professional knows, it's about how you follow up with someone after the initial investment that truly makes the connection. Two to three days after the event send a short (a couple sentences) email expressing how much you enjoyed meeting them and bringing up a topic the two of you discussed (you wrote it on their card, remember?).
- **Ask questions** – If you're feeling uncomfortable talking about yourself all you need to do is ask questions. Most people really enjoy talking about the things they care about so if you show interest by asking questions you will endear yourself to them and solidify a new connection.

A great book to learn more about connecting with others is Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends & Influence People*.